

House Bill 176
January 15, 2015
Presented by Ken McDonald
House Fish & Game Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Ken McDonald, Wildlife Division Administrator for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). I am here today on behalf of the Director in opposition to House Bill 176.

This bill prohibits the Fish and Wildlife Commission from prohibiting use of crossbows during any season or area where archery equipment may be used. The main impact of this proposal is that it would allow the use of crossbows during the archery-only season, as they can already be used during the 5-week general big game firearm season. Crossbows have a much greater range than regular bows and arrows and are more efficient, accurate, and easier to use than traditional archery equipment, especially for the novice. They are not in the same class of weapons as bows and arrows and should not be considered as such. Rather, they fall into a restricted weapon class that includes muzzleloaders, traditional handgun, and shotgun in terms of range, accuracy, and efficiency.

Archery hunters currently enjoy a 6-week archery-only season. There are currently over 43,000 archery hunters in Montana and their numbers have doubled since 1990 as interest has increased and hunters seek to take advantage of the season overlap with the elk rut. We have been able to offer a liberal, lengthy archery-only season because of the relative inefficiency and limitations of traditional archery equipment. Passage of this bill would mean many more people participating in archery-only seasons through crossbow hunting, each of whom can more easily take an animal. The added pressure on game populations, as well as equity issues between archery and firearm hunters, would result in the need to reduce archery hunting season opportunities through a shorter season, limited permits, or by some other means. We believe the majority of archery hunters prefer more opportunity vs. more effective crossbows.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission already has authority to allow or regulate archery equipment "taking into account applicable standards as technical innovations in archery equipment change" (page 4, lines 12-14). To date, they have declined to allow cross bows, opting instead to maximize opportunity through a long season length and liberal season structure. This bill usurps the Fish and Wildlife Commission's authority to establish seasons and opportunities through its transparent and publically vetted process. Legislatively mandating that a traditional bow equates to a cross bow limits the Commission's flexibility and ultimately will reduce overall hunter opportunity.

For these reasons, FWP recommends a do not pass on HB 176.

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